

Appendix A

Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Recreation Grant Selection Process

I. Introduction

This part of the Rhode Island State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) establishes and describes the Recreation Grant Selection Process (RGSP) and serves as the rules and procedures governing the RI Recreation Resources Review Committee (RRRC). The RGSP is the procedure the State of Rhode Island utilizes to solicit, evaluate, and select outdoor recreational land acquisition and facility development projects eligible for grant assistance under the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the State-Local Recreation System Development Program provided for under various State bonds. The RGSP is developed in response to a requirement of the National Park Service that such a process be utilized by the states in the allocation of available LWCF resources. The procedures must be designed to insure that projects are selected for funding in a rational and systematic manner open to public scrutiny, that the Fund is accessible to all citizens consistent with the purposes of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, and that projects selected meet priority recreational needs.

The Governor has designated the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) as Rhode Island's state liaison agency for administering the federal LWCF monies. DEM also administers the State bonds supporting the State-Local Recreation System Development Program. The Recreation Resources Review Committee is instituted by the SCORP as a broad-based adjunct body to DEM for the purpose of administering the RGSP and advising the DEM director in funding project applications.

The State Planning Council, through the adoption of this document as an element of the State Guide Plan, establishes the RGSP and authorizes the RRRC to implement the allocation of funds, funding categories, criteria for applicant eligibility, the level of public participation required in project formulation, and criteria for scoring project proposals based on how well they meet the goals, objectives, and action items identified in the SCORP and Community Comprehensive Plans. Scoring criteria also consider other documented need, including accessibility of proposed projects to all segments of the population including handicapped and minority populations and other LWCF requirements (found in Parts 640 and 660 of the LWCF Grants Manual).

II. The Recreation Resources Review Committee

The Recreation Resources Review Committee (RRRC) is established for the purposes of soliciting, evaluating, establishing the relative priority of recreation grant projects, and submitting to the Director of the Department of Environmental Management recommendations for funding recreation grant proposals. In order to effectively carry out these responsibilities and to guarantee a representative and balanced evaluation, the membership of the RRRC is structured to provide both the professional expertise and the diversity of interests needed to accurately and fairly evaluate and rank the variety of project proposals which can be foreseen.

The RRRC consists of at least six but not more than twelve experts in outdoor recreation, natural resource management, and conservation of open space, selected with the objective of providing balanced representation of state, municipal, public, and private constituencies. Permanently represented on the RRRC are the Governor's Office, the Department of Environmental Management (serves as the State Liaison Office to the National Park Service), and the Statewide Planning Program. The State Planning Council shall appoint additional committee members for terms of up to three years. The following list identifies organizations that are typically asked to designate a representative(s) to the RRRC, however, the State Planning Council is not limited to this list and may appoint representatives of other organizations as deemed appropriate. Existing members may be reappointed. Vacancies are filled in the same manner as regular appointments.

RRRC Membership: Agencies or groups typically asked to designate representatives:

AGENCY	MEMBERS
American Planning Association, RI Chapter	1
American Society of Landscape Architects, RI Chapter	1
Audubon Society of Rhode Island	1
RI League of Cities and Towns	1
RI Resource Conservation and Development Area Council	1
RI Parks and Recreation Association, at least one from a distressed community as defined by RIGL 4-13-12	2
Urban League of Rhode Island	1

The RRRC shall elect a chair and a vice-chair for three-year terms.

If a Committee member misses three consecutive meetings the RRRC will report the absence to the Chair of the State Planning Council with a recommendation to remove the individual from the Committee.

III. Allocation of Federal and State Funds

Allocation of Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds - Under the LWCF, states are given the prerogative of determining the most equitable allocation of available funds among the various categories of applicants (generally state and municipal). The State may use up to 10 percent of the total LWCF apportionment for planning projects and for maintaining an updated SCORP. The remaining funds (not less than 90 percent) shall be split equally between state and municipal projects.

Allocation of State Acquisition and Development Bonds, Appropriations, and other Sources of Funds - State funds are allocated as provided in the authorizing legislation, or regulations issued pursuant thereto, of the specific funding program. The Department of Environmental Management, with the advice of the RRRC, establishes the amount of state funding to be made available within a particular grant round, consistent with applicable laws and regulations governing the source of the state funding.

IV. The Recreation Grant Selection Process

Funding Cycle

Funding cycles are determined by the availability of funds and coordination with other State funding processes. During the term of this SCORP, it is anticipated that the RRRC will schedule grant rounds every two years beginning in 2003. Each funding cycle takes approximately 180 days commencing with the solicitation of project proposals. Applicants have 90 days to respond to a solicitation notice with submission of completed grant application. Following the proposal submission closing date, a 90 day period is provided for staff review and RRRC evaluation and ranking of the proposals. Funding cycles conclude with notification to all applicants of the rating assigned to their project(s) by the Committee and transmittal of funding commitment letters to those applicants selected for funding.

Setting Funding Categories and Limits

Certain funding categories may be established by law or regulation. The DEM is responsible for informing the RRRC of LWCF and State funds available and any restrictions on those funds. For funds not designated by law or regulation, RRRC shall set funding categories that promote equity and efficiency. The RRRC may also set a minimum required rating score for each proposal in order to promote selection of the highest quality projects. If a proposal does not attain the minimum score, it will not be recommended for funding. Recreation grants generally require a financial match by the recipient.

Accordingly, at the outset of each grant round, the RRRC may:

- Set a maximum per project funding limit for each category.
- Establish a maximum number of submissions per municipality for project proposals.
- Establish funding categories and allocation for each category.
- Set a financial match requirement for grant recipients.

Note: If a surplus occurs as a result of: 1) total funding requests are less than the available monies for a category, or, 2) state or local projects do not score high enough to qualify for funding, the RRRC may reallocate the surplus to another category or may reserve the surplus for a future grant round.

Funding categories:

1. Renovation of Existing or Construction of New Outdoor Recreational Facilities:
Small project assistance grants (\$25,000 or less)
Large project assistance grants (over \$25,000)
2. Acquisition of Land for Outdoor Recreation
3. Distressed Communities Grants (as defined by RIGL 45-13-12, see page A-11)

Financial match requirement: Grant recipients under categories 1. or 2. will be required to match 50 percent of the total project cost; grant recipients under category 3. (Distressed Communities) will be required to provide a 25 percent match for development projects, no match will be required for parkland acquisition.

The RRRC may alter funding categories and raise or lower the match requirement for any grant round or category, as circumstances require.

Eligibility Determination

Only State agencies and municipalities may apply for funding under these RGSP procedures. DEM capital and non-capital asset management programs shall be the basis for determining DEM sponsored projects to receive LWCF and State recreation funds. Other State agencies must demonstrate how their proposals meet the goals, objectives, and action items identified in the SCORP and Community Comprehensive Plans. Municipally sponsored projects will compete for funding under the guidelines that follow. Non-municipal entities must partner in grant proposals with a municipality who must be the official applicant.

Municipal Eligibility

The RRRC is responsible for determining the eligibility of municipal applicants to participate in the RGSP. Eligibility is determined at the commencement of each grant round, and is based on the State approval status of an applicant's Community Comprehensive Plans (CCP). The Statewide Planning Program provides standards and guidance to municipalities for the development of Community Comprehensive Plans (*Handbook 16: Handbook on the Local Comprehensive Plan*) and coordinates the State review and approval of local comprehensive plans.

There are three categories of municipal eligibility:

Fully Eligible: A community will be considered fully eligible if it has a State-approved comprehensive plan.

Conditionally Eligible: A community will be considered conditionally eligible if its comprehensive plan has not received State approval or if State approval has expired. Under such circumstances, conditional status will be granted for a period of twelve months from the opening of the grant round. Applications made by municipalities with conditional eligibility will be rated by the RRRC, and if selected, a project agreement may be executed contingent upon the following condition: if State approval of the community's comprehensive plan is not achieved within the twelve month period of conditional eligibility, no more than 75% of the grant funds due the project sponsor will be disbursed. If State approval of the community's comprehensive plan is not received within 12 months following the end of the conditional eligibility period, the RRRC may revoke its commitment to disburse the remaining 25% of grant funds due to the project sponsor.

Ineligible: A community will be considered ineligible to apply for funding in subsequent grant rounds if after having been placed in conditional eligibility status it fails to achieve State approval for its comprehensive plan within the prescribed twelve month period. The community will be considered fully eligible for future grant rounds upon providing the RRRC with a copy of the State certification of approval for its comprehensive plan.

Solicitation of Proposals

The DEM, in conjunction with the RRRC, authorizes the solicitation of grant proposals. The State Liaison Officer is responsible for sending a notice to the Chief Elected Official and the manager/administrator of all cities and towns. The notice shall include the municipalities' current eligibility status, the procedures to be followed for submitting a grant application, project eligibility requirements, the deadline for submission of project proposals, and other materials deemed appropriate by the RRRC such as available funding, legislative citations, examples of fundable projects, and cost sharing formulas of grant programs. Municipalities must submit proposals to the State Liaison Officer within 90 days of the notice. A press release is also sent to local media by DEM, and information posted on the DEM website regarding application procedures for the grant round.

Public Participation Requirements

The RGSP requires public involvement to ensure that projects selected have widespread public acceptance and support, best reflect current needs and desires of the citizenry, and are to the maximum extent possible, free from potential problems such as environmental conflicts. The required minimum public participation for a grant application to qualify for review is as follows:

Renovation of existing or construction of new facilities utilizing Small Project Assistance Grants (\$25,000 or less) shall require the consent of the local governing body.

All other projects including renovations or construction projects utilizing Large Project Assistance Grants (over \$25,000) or the acquisition of land for recreation, shall require public notice and at least one public hearing or meeting held not more than 120 days prior to the grant submission.

The RRRC encourages all project sponsors to exceed these minimum public participation requirements (particularly for larger-scale, projects) by means of public informational meetings, a project advisory committee, neighborhood surveys, or similar measures.

Preliminary Evaluation of Applications

After the close of the 90 day application period, DEM staff have 30 days to conduct a preliminary evaluation to determine the completeness of the application. Completeness is determined by:

- Submission by an eligible applicant
- Documentation demonstrating the public participation requirements have been met, and;
- The application has been completed in accordance with directions and contains sufficient information to allow the proposal to be rated.

Proposals that meet these criteria will be forwarded to the RRRC for evaluation and ranking. Deficient proposals will be returned to applicants with recommendations for addressing the inadequacies. Every effort will be made to return deficient applications to their sponsors in time to allow re-submittal prior to the RRRC rating process.

As part of the preliminary evaluation, DEM and Statewide Planning staffs prepare a brief report for each application to be reviewed by RRRC members. The report may contain:

- Background information on supply and demand for recreational activities in the applicant's jurisdiction.
- The current status of the applicant's Community Comprehensive Plan and, if applicable, the local Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Plan;
- An assessment of the project's consistency with the goals, policies, and recommendations of the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, the Greenspace and Greenways Plan, and other relevant State Guide Plan elements as may be determined by the RRRC.
- An evaluation of the applicant's operation and maintenance capacity and history for outdoor recreation facilities based upon field investigations.

The staff reports and copies of the grant applications will be provided to the members of the RRRC prior to the RRRC meeting(s) convened to score and rank the applications.

Final Evaluation of Applications

Upon the close of the 30 day preliminary evaluation period, the RRRC will hold priority-rating sessions at which all complete applications will be evaluated by the Committee and a point value assigned to each utilizing the priority-rating system established in this Appendix (described in the following section). These sessions are conducted as open public meetings consistent with the State Administrative Procedures Act and the State Open Meetings Law. The Committee will notify applicants of the date, time, and place of the meetings.

Utilizing the information contained in the application, the staff reports, plus their individual expertise Committee members will assign points to each application under the criteria contained in the rating system. Committee members will have access to Community Comprehensive Plans and the Recreation element of the State Guide Plan (SCORP) for reference. Scoring of proposals shall be on score sheets provided by the DEM staff, and shall include the signature of each member scoring a proposal. The score for each proposal will be tabulated by adding the total scores assigned to the application by each committee member and dividing the points by the number of members who participated in the scoring.

Proposal scores are subject to a statistical evaluation. If staff finds a variation of greater than 10 from the standard deviation within the scoring of any application, the Committee will be notified and members be allowed to review their scoring prior to submitting their signed score sheets.

Project Selection/Funding Commitment

When Committee evaluation and scoring of all eligible projects within the grant round has been completed, the RRRC will hold a meeting to review the list(s) of proposals ranked by final score. Proposals will be recommended for funding in rank order of final score within the limit of available funding within each category, with the following exceptions:

If the RRRC has established a minimum point score threshold, funding will not be recommended for projects whose final score is below the threshold score regardless of their ranking within a grant category.

The Committee also reserves the right to recommend a limit to the number of grants awarded to a single applicant in one grant round.

The Committee will, by vote, adopt a recommendation for proposals to be funded based upon the ranked list(s) of projects and funding available within each category and will forward this recommendation to the Director of DEM.

DEM will notify project sponsors in writing of the Director's decision to fund a project and the grant amount offered. The State Liaison Officer reserves the indicated amount of funding for the project for a specific commitment period one-year for all LWCF assisted projects and State-assisted acquisition projects or two-years for State-assisted development projects.

Once notified, grant award applicants must obtain the National Park Service's and DEM's approval of the final project plan, secure all necessary permits and additional approvals such as state wetlands or CRMC permits, local zoning or building approvals, and activate the project. Any project that is not activated within the commitment period will be subject to termination of its funding, in which case funds earmarked for the project become available for reallocation during the next scheduled funding round.

Funding commitments offered to project sponsors are subject to the availability of funds. The RRRC and the DEM are not responsible for subsequent cutbacks or reductions in fund allocations. All project applicants to whom funding commitments have been offered will share funding cutbacks in proportion to the grant amount.

V. Priority Rating System Overview

The RRRC uses a rating system to identify which project proposals will best serve communities and Rhode Islanders. The two-page Priority-Rating System form used by the RRRC for scoring all applications follows this section. The numerical ranking system scores projects based on consistency with the community comprehensive plan, the State recreation plan (SCORP) and other applicable State plans, application quality, the applicant's commitment to operation and maintenance, special features, and recreation development/land acquisition.

Section A – Planning Consistency emphasizes project consistency and conformance with applicable planning documents (SCORP, Community Comprehensive Plans, Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Plans, and State Guide Plan elements) ensuring that funding goes towards priority needs identified and documented through a formal planning process and for proposals that are well documented.

Section B – Sponsor Operation and Maintenance is intended to evaluate the applicant's operation and maintenance record of existing recreation resources under its control, including facilities funded under previous federal or state grants, as well as the community's commitment to maintaining the proposed facility. These criteria recognize that it may be counterproductive to award grants for additional capital development and facility expansion to applicants who cannot demonstrate an adequate commitment to operation and maintenance of their facilities.

Section C – Bonus Features offer points to projects that incorporate special features or address major state and community goals beyond recreation and natural resource protection.

Section D – Project Merit - Recreational Development Projects OR Land Acquisition provides a means for comparing the relative merits of projects for land acquisition or recreational development. Land acquisition and recreational development projects are scored separately.

Section A – Planning Consistency 25 Total Points Available		Total Points Awarded _____	
Criteria Name	Criteria Description	Maximum Points	Points Awarded
Local Planning Consistency	The proposal satisfies priority needs documented in the Community Comprehensive Plan and conforms to the plan's acquisition and development schedule for project priority, timeline, and cost.	10	
State Planning Consistency	The project satisfies priority needs documented in the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), Greenspace and Greenways Plan, and any other State Guide Plan elements identified by the RRRC. Points will be awarded based on the number and/or importance of recommended actions supported by the proposal.	10	
Applicant Priority	The applicant's highest priority application will receive 5 points. Additional applications will receive progressively fewer points.	5	
Section B - Applicant's Commitment to Operation and Maintenance 10 Total Points Available		Total Points Awarded _____	
Criteria Name	Criteria Description	Maximum Points	Points Awarded
Operation and Maintenance Requirements	The applicant must document the operation and maintenance needs including budget, equipment, and labor for the proposed project and explain how the municipality will meet them.	5	
Maintenance Record	Evaluation of the applicant's maintenance of other outdoor recreation facilities under their jurisdiction.	5	
Section C - Bonus Features 22 Total Points Available		Total Points Awarded _____	
Criteria Name	Criteria Description	Maximum Points	Points Awarded
Multi-community Regional Needs	The project addresses multi-community or regional needs.	3	
Master Plan	The project is part of a multi-phase project with a master plan. (The Master Plan must be submitted to the RRRC.)	3	
Economic Revitalization	The project will improve the economy of an area. For example, spurs job creation, town center redevelopment, or development of a facility in an area identified for revitalization in State or community programs.	5	
Brownfield Redevelopment	The redevelopment of a brownfield as defined by DEM Remediation Regulations.	5	
Special or Innovative Design Features	Examples include: "green design" features (e.g. recycled materials, water or energy conservation), preservation of an historical feature, landscaping, or habitat restoration.	3	
Exceptional Features	The project has special features not noted elsewhere in the application. For example, promotes arts, tourism, or special programming.	3	

Section D - Recreation Development OR Land Acquisition 50 Total Points Available		Total Points Awarded _____	
Criteria Name	Criteria Description	Maximum Points	Points Awarded
Criteria for Land Acquisition Projects			
Relationship to Need	Points will be awarded based on the need and/or demand for parks or other recreational land in the area.	15	
Relationship to Overall System	The project will add to existing public or protected land, will close an in holding, or is identified in the Greenspace and Greenways Plan, or another element of the State Guide Plan.	10	
Multiple Objectives	The project combines recreational use with unique or significant natural, cultural, or historical features.	10	
Equity, Service, and Accessibility	The project will expand the recreational opportunities available to disadvantaged segments of the population the project is located within or provides enhanced service to neighborhoods in which low income and/or minority residents are over-represented the project is located in a densely populated neighborhood or a neighborhood identified for revitalization by State or community programs the project is served by public transportation (within ¼ mile of a bus stop) or is proximate to a bikeway	15 (5 for each of A, B, & C)	
Criteria for Outdoor Recreation Development Projects			
Relationship to Need	Points will be awarded based on the need and/or demand for the proposed recreational activity in the area.	10	
Expanded Usage	The project adds to the number of recreational amenities or hours of usage (e.g. additional fields are added to a facility or lights are added so it can be used at night)	10	
Multiple Uses	The project appropriately integrates a variety of recreational opportunities providing activities for a mix of age groups and degrees of physical abilities.	5	
Improved User Comfort or Safety	The project improves user comfort or safety such as the addition of sanitary facilities, fencing to separate recreational activities, benches, shade trees, or shelters over picnic tables.	5	
Equity, Service, and Accessibility	The project will expand the recreational opportunities available to disadvantaged segments of the population. the project is located within or provides enhanced service to neighborhoods in which low income and/or minority residents are over-represented the project is located in a densely populated neighborhood or a neighborhood identified for revitalization by State or community programs the project provides activity or amenity features which expand the recreational opportunities for physically or mentally challenged individuals (such features to be in excess of normally mandated barrier-free accessibility standards) the project is served by public transportation (within ¼ mile of a bus stop) or is proximate to a bikeway	20	

State Regulatory Definition of Distressed Community

CHAPTER 45-13, *State Aid*, § 45-13-12 *Distressed communities' relief fund*.

- (a) There is established a fund to provide state assistance to those Rhode Island cities and towns which have the highest property tax burdens relative to the wealth of taxpayers.
- (b) *Establishment of indices:* Four (4) indices of distress shall be established to determine eligibility for the program. Each community shall be ranked by each distress index and any community that falls into the lowest fifteen percent (15%) of at least three (3) of the four (4) indices shall be eligible to receive assistance. The four (4) indices are established as follows:
 - (1) *Percent of tax levy to full value of property.* This shall be computed by dividing the tax levy of each municipality by the full value of property for each municipality. For the 1990-91 fiscal year, tax levy and full value shall be as of the assessment date December 31, 1986.
 - (2) *Per capita income.* This shall be the most recent estimate reported by the U.S. department of commerce, bureau of the census.
 - (3) *Percent of personal income to full value of property.* This shall be computed by multiplying the per capita income above by the most recent population estimate as reported by the U.S. department of commerce, bureau of the census, and dividing the result by the full value of property.
 - (4) *Per capita full value of property.* This shall be the full value of property divided by the most recent estimate of population by the U.S. department of commerce, bureau of the census.

As of 2003, the following municipalities met this definition:

Central Falls	West Warwick
Pawtucket	Woonsocket
Providence	